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“Once Upon A Time”: Childhood Temporalities in Late- and Post-Franco Spanish Cinema

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“Once Upon A Time”: Childhood Temporalities in Late- and Post-Franco Spanish Cinema¹

Abstract

Since the early 1970s, children and childhood have proved fertile terrain for Spanish filmmakers. *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, Erice, 1973), *Raise Ravens* (*Cría cuervos*, Saura, 1976) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del fauno*, del Toro, 2006) provocatively reimagine childhood temporalities through their opening sequences, cinematography and the depiction of objects of inheritance. For contemporary queer theorists (J. Jack Halberstam (2012), Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009), Lee Edelman (2004)), childhood temporalities facilitate the comprehension of postmodern experiences of time as well as subverting the politics of reproductive futurism centred on the child. In late- and post-Franco Spain, the child's subversive relationship to time constitutes a direct challenge to the rigid linearity of Francoist historiography and the atomisation of Republican memory and history. Beyond Spanish borders, these films reveal that the figure of the child challenges conceptualisations of chronological time as rigid, fixed, linear and progressive. In the case of transnational co-production *Pan's Labyrinth*, this evokes a plethora of histories, concerned with colonial pasts and globalised presents, buried beneath the surface of postmemory cultural production.

Keywords

Childhood, time, Spanish cinema, *El espíritu de la colmena*, *Cría cuervos*, *El laberinto del fauno*, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *Raise Ravens*, *Pan's Labyrinth*

Main Text

Towards the end of the much-discussed opening credits of *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, Erice, 1973), a hand-drawn illustration of a golden pocket watch appears alongside the name of the film's director, Víctor Erice. The watch is the penultimate icon in a series of sketches which detail the key events of the film. Foregrounding the significance of the perspective of the child, these introductory illustrations were produced by Isabel Tellería and Ana Torrent, the actresses who play their namesake child protagonists. By means of a dissolve, the image of the watch transitions to the final drawing of the credit sequence: a group of children seated before a large cinema screen. This metacinematic screen at once depicts a scene from *Frankenstein* (Whale, 1931), in which Little Maria encounters the creature by the lake, and prefigures the climax of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, in which Ana herself happens upon a monstrous being. As the accompanying soundtrack, an instrumental version of the infantile refrain "Vamos a contar mentiras" ("Let's Tell Fibs"), reaches a climactic crescendo, the camera accelerates towards the drawing of the screen to frame it within an extreme close-up. The words "Érase una vez..." ("Once Upon A Time...") fade into view at the top of the screen before a sharp cut transports the spectator into the diegetic world of the film, in which a truck makes its way along a narrow road in a desolate landscape. An intertitle in white text unfolds across the bottom of the screen, reading: "Un lugar de la meseta castellana hacia 1.940..." ("Somewhere on the Castilian plain around 1940...").

Conceptually conjoining childhood, time and cinema, the opening credits of *The Spirit of the Beehive* highlight the complexity of childhood temporalities, which are paradoxically situated between locality and universality. Regarding this contradiction, Henry Jenkins argues that

while childhood tends to be nostalgically imagined by adults as “a utopian space [...] beyond historical change”, it is in fact “not timeless but, rather, subject to the same historical shifts and institutional factors that shape all human experience” (1998, pp. 3-4). A further tension haunting childhood temporalities is their curiousness, as illuminated by J. Jack Halberstam and Kathryn Bond Stockton. For Halberstam, children “inhabit different understandings of time, and experience the passing of time differently” (2012, xxiii); they are “always already anarchic and rebellious, out of order and out of time” (2011, p. 27). For Bond Stockton, the temporal configuration of childhood often hinges upon notions of delay, postponement and suspense: “their supposed gradual growth, their suggested slow unfolding, [...] relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, “growing up”) toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness” (2009, p. 4). Drawing upon this nexus of ideas, this article analyses the intersection of childhood and time as in the aforementioned *The Spirit of the Beehive* alongside two further films: *Raise Ravens* (*Cría cuervos*, Saura, 1976) and *Pan’s Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del fauno*, del Toro, 2006). Although there are a plethora of Spanish and Latin American child-centred films, these three are canonical and iconic cinematic depictions of childhood both within and beyond the Hispanic world. While *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Raise Ravens* are Spanish texts created during the final years of Francoism, *Pan’s Labyrinth* is a transnational co-production directed by a Mexican filmmaker and jointly produced by the Spanish company El Deseo and the Mexican enterprise Tequila Gang that pays homage to the two earlier works. Nevertheless, these three films share a common focus on the female child in relation to the specific socio-historical circumstances of Civil War and Francoist Spain, albeit from distinct historical and geographical vantage points. That the protagonists of these films are gendered female, amidst a plethora of similar works centred on the male child such as *Secrets of the Heart* (*Secretos del corazón*, Armendáriz, 1997), *Butterfly’s Tongue* (*La lengua de las mariposas*, Cuerda,

1999) and *The Devil's Backbone* (*El espinazo del diablo*, del Toro, 2001) to name but a few, is crucial to their reconfiguration of time. These female protagonists, unlike their male counterparts, subversively destabilise patriarchal genealogies.² After briefly introducing the films, I analyse their opening sequences, cinematography and their focus on objects of inheritance in order to demonstrate the extent to which these films construct childhood temporalities as subversively disruptive. The cinematic children within these case studies destabilise and defy the patriarchal, heteronormative future into which they are expected to grow. This is not only relevant to Francoist Spain, but also has wider implications for the ways in which western cultures understand childhood as a linear, vertical progression towards adulthood. At stake is a revisionist understanding not just of Spain's Francoist past, but also of colonial histories and of contemporary globalised presents.

Plotting the Child and Time

Widely considered one of the most canonical works of Spanish cinema, *The Spirit of the Beehive* constitutes the cornerstone of late and then subsequent post-Franco cinematic representations of childhood. Produced just a few years before the death of Franco, the film places two child protagonists, Ana and Isabel, in the historical setting of post-Civil War Spain. Without explicitly mentioning the war, the film surrounds these child characters with family members and a wider community attempting to come to terms with the traumatic experience and aftermath of the conflict. The film articulates this collective suffering through the perspective of the two children, drawing parallels between the suspended temporal paradigms of childhood and trauma.

Like *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *Raise Ravens* centres on the child and childhood in the context of Francoist Spain, once again through a child protagonist named Ana and played by Ana Torrent. However, in contrast to the historical setting of *The Spirit of the Beehive* in post-Civil War Spain, *Raise Ravens* takes place in the contemporaneous setting of the 1970s and in the imagined future setting of the 1990s. The film depicts Ana and her sisters, Irene (Conchita Pérez) and Maite (Maite Sánchez) as they attempt to come to terms with the death of their father Anselmo (Héctor Alterio). Having already lost their mother, the orphaned girls find themselves in the care of their strict aunt Paulina (Mónica Randall), who is assisted by buxom housekeeper Rosa (Florinda Chico). Time in this film is paradoxical. While the temporal present of the film is restricted to the summer of an undisclosed year, the free-flowing action darts back and forth amongst past, present and future.

Finally, the contemporary *Pan's Labyrinth* focuses on the pre-adolescent Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), who moves to the countryside with her mother Carmen (Ariadna Gil) to their new family home. The recently widowed Carmen has remarried; her new spouse is Captain Vidal (Sergi López), an unscrupulous Francoist officer charged with exterminating the remnants of the Republican resistance that remain in the mountains. The film crosscuts between Ofelia's encounters with a host of frightening fairy-tale creatures and the dramatic confrontations of Vidal and the Resistance, culminating in the deaths of both Ofelia and her stepfather. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, clocks and time symbolise, both visually and thematically, the industrialisation and materiality of fascism, specifically through their representation via Vidal who pores over his smashed pocket watch and whose office space in the attic visually resembles the internal mechanics of a clock. But given Vidal's status as stepfather to Ofelia, clocks and time are also linked with patriarchal hierarchy. Ofelia's subversive relationship to time is thus rendered all the more pertinent as she traverses multiple temporal planes, defies

the temporal limitations placed upon her by Vidal alongside other male figures of authority (such as the Faun) and ultimately transcends time to live eternally.

Beginning with the Child / The Child as Beginning

The opening sequences of each of these three films immediately foreground the significance of time and its relationship to the child, either through the use of intertitles that ground the films within specific historical settings (*The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth*) or through the placement of the child at the juncture of intersecting temporal currents (*Raise Ravens*). In each case, this direct focus on the conceptual intersection of childhood and time cinematographically emphasises the importance of the child as a point of inception, an opening, a beginning. That the child constitutes a chronological starting point in terms of each of the films' plots compounds the typification of childhood as an introductory stage on the path of evolution into adulthood.

Both *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth* deploy intertitles in their opening sequences as a means of historically situating the action due to unfold. Moreover, both films immediately relate the experience of time to the experience of childhood through explicit references to fairy tales. As described above, the opening sequence of *The Spirit of the Beehive* conjoins childhood and time through the inclusion of hand-drawn illustrations which are then temporally contextualised through two intertitles. While the first intertitle, "Once Upon A Time", conjures up the mythical time of the fairy tale, the second quixotic intertitle, "Somewhere on the Castilian plain around 1940...", situates the child and childhood in the very specific historical context of post-Civil War Spain. That said, the vagueness of both place and time conveyed by this second intertitle, coupled with the inference to Cervantes'

Don Quixote whose eponymous protagonist has a tenuous grip on reality, tempers this specificity via the theme of unreliable memory.³

Pan's Labyrinth performs a similar gesture, immediately juxtaposing childhood with past time through the use of introductory intertitles. Preceding the first diegetic images of the film, the following words appear in white text on a black background:

Spain, 1944

The Civil War is over.

Hidden in the mountains, armed men are still fighting the new Fascist regime.

Military posts are established to exterminate the Resistance.

The scene that follows these intertitles depicts the protagonist of the film, Ofelia, bleeding to death at the edge of the labyrinth before a narrative voice-over relates the tale of a princess who lived in the Underground Realm and dreamt of the human world. The tale commences with the phrase “Cuenten que hace mucho” (“A long time ago”), echoing the fairy tale “Once Upon a Time” with which *The Spirit of the Beehive* begins. Two visual elements complement the analeptic retreat into the past implied by the narrator’s opening line: the movement of the camera, which rotates in an anti-clockwise direction, and the stream of blood extending from Ofelia’s nostril, which gradually reverses itself. As the narrative voice-over begins, the camera zooms in on Ofelia’s face, gaining speed and penetrating her pupil. In this way, the body of the child simultaneously becomes the vessel for the story and for time itself.

By placing the child and childhood at the intersection of conflicting temporalities, both films underscore the ambivalent relationship between childhood and time, with the figure of the female child caught between historical specificity and universality. This gesture is itself

ambivalent, as significant conceptually with regard to the cinematic representation of childhood temporalities as it is, more specifically, to the particular socio-historical context of late- and post-Franco Spain. The positioning of childhood at the juncture of historical and mythical temporalities evidences how, as Jenkins observes, “Our modern conception of the innocent child presumes its universality across historical periods and across widely divergent cultures” (1998, p. 15). Drawing attention to the falsity of this universality, Jenkins asserts that the innocent child as a figure is palimpsestic, a myth that “has a history”, a “palimpsest of ideas from different historical contexts” (1998, p. 15). In this regard, the clashing temporalities at the core of films centred on the child, such as *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan’s Labyrinth*, draw attention to the interconnectedness of myth and history within the conceptual context of the innocent child.

Moreover, by situating the child and childhood at the intersection of history and myth, these films also highlight how the curious relationship of the child to time can become a metaphor for our understanding of time more generally. Diverse approaches to this question are apparent in contemporary responses to cultural representations of the child and childhood. For Jenkins, the temporariness of childhood means that it “becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future” (1998, p. 5). For Halberstam, the fact that children “inhabit different understandings of time, and experience the passing of time differently” lends itself to postmodern conceptualisations of time as “not linear [...] more twisty, curvy, more relative” (2012, xxiii). In short, the universality of the child figure applies not only to children and childhoods across a diverse range of histories, geographies and socio-political circumstances, but also to humanity more generally.

In the more specific socio-historical circumstances of Francoist and post-Franco Spain in which these films are set and produced, the placement of the child and childhood at the intersection of mythically- and historically-informed temporalities becomes more significant. With regard to *The Spirit of the Beehive*, this gesture implicitly undermines the censorship still in place at the time of the film's production during the latter years of the Francoist regime. The conjunction of the fairy-tale intertitle "Once Upon a Time", the metacinematic screen and the accompanying infantile refrain "Let's Tell Fibs" immediately frames both childhood, as depicted onscreen, and cinema as devices grounded in creative fabrication and myth. Utilising the universal appeal of the child and childhood, the film seemingly delocalises the specificity of children's experiences in post-Civil War Spain so as to evade the censorship that remained in place until 1978. Ultimately though, the opening sequence of *The Spirit of the Beehive* deliberately overemphasises the fictitiousness and mythical character of both childhood and cinema in order to paradoxically assert the opposite: that childhood and cinema are deeply embedded in a specific socio-historical context, in this case that of post-war and late-Francoist Spain. Childhood, cinema and an ambiguous temporal setting therefore provide an implicit screen for an embittered political critique.

In contemporary Spanish-Mexican co-production *Pan's Labyrinth*, the juxtaposition of distinct temporalities through the child does not concern the evasion of Francoist censorship. Rather, the film explores the local and global valences of the relationship between childhood and time, positing the figure of the dead child as a metaphor for a time that is now past and inaccessible. At a local level, the death of the child is representative of the many children who died at the hands of the Franco regime, whether directly in military assaults during (and

beyond) the Civil War or indirectly as a result of malnourishment in the *años de hambre*, mistreatment and/or neglect during the Francoist period.⁴ At a global level, the death of the child functions metaphorically, a potent symbol for the perceived loss of innocence that accompanies the transition from childhood into adolescence.⁵ Situated at the intersection of historical and mythical temporalities, the dead child in *Pan's Labyrinth* functions as a compelling image of the pastness of the child, appealing simultaneously to the local specificities of Francoist, post-Francoist and contemporary Spain as well as to universal concerns surrounding the temporariness of childhood.

As in the films discussed above, the opening credits of *Raise Ravens* also establish the temporal parameters of the film. However, rather than using intertitles as a means of temporally grounding the action, the film immediately submerges us in a world of childhood and pastness by means of an album of family photographs. A number of close-ups and extreme close-ups introduce the photographs, in both black and white and colour, depicting a mother, father and three daughters. While there is no establishing shot, the punched holes visible alongside the photographs indicate that these images are placed within a family album. The camera, at times remaining static, at times panning across or zooming in on the photographs, quietly surveys the pages of the album. These images are accompanied by a soft instrumental piece, which becomes an important aural leitmotif over the course of the film, occurring both diegetically and non-diegetically in scenes that detail interactions between Ana and her deceased mother.⁶ The accompanying captions immediately, if implicitly, prefigure the film's projection into the future, given that the captions have been written by the adult incarnation of protagonist Ana. For example, the first photograph to occupy the frame is accompanied by a caption which reads "El día en que nací yo, como dice la canción" ("On the day I was born, as the song goes"). Like the films discussed above, *Raise Ravens*

immediately places the child and childhood at the juncture of two conflicting temporalities. But while *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth* engage tensions between history and myth, *Raise Ravens* emphasises the extent to which the child is caught between past and future.

The photograph album upon which *Raise Ravens* opens posits the time of the child as a past time, unreachable other than through visual traces such as family photographs or through fragments of memory. Rather than exist in isolation, this pastness is part of a temporal continuum that encompasses past, present and future. This is most apparent in the tension between the family photographs and the hand-written captions which, for Ryan Prout, indicate “a difficulty in reconciliation with the past as well as a sense of alienation between Ana’s child and adult selves” (2005, p. 152). The cinematography supports this assertion, at one point zooming in on a photograph of the child protagonist, framing her face in an extreme close-up that conveys a longing for comprehension not easily satisfied by these photographs. These tensions between past and future escalate as the film progresses. The action darts back and forth amongst past, present and future without always clarifying on which temporal plane events are occurring. The adult Ana intervenes in the narrative, herself highlighting her uncertainty about the hows and whys of what happened to her as a child. And to further complicate matters, the same actress – Geraldine Chaplin – plays both Ana’s mother and the adult Ana. This gesture, as Thomas Deveny notes, not only fuses mother and daughter but also maintains that “the ‘present’ of the narrative is also the past, a flash-back from the confessions of 1995” (1993, p. 217). In these ways, *Raise Ravens* emphasises the means through which the child functions metaphorically as a receptacle of past and future simultaneously.

As in *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, the representation of childhood in the opening credits of *Raise Ravens* carries both local and global resonances. With regard to the local, the limited access to the past provided by this family album, both for the adult Ana and for us as spectators, parallels the contemporaneous restrictions placed upon access to, and discussions of, Spain's Francoist past at the time of the film's production in the latter years of the regime. In terms of the global, the photograph album displayed in this sequence foregrounds the ways in which childhood, but more specifically ideas of childhood, are constructed by adults. The adult Ana curates a particular vision of her childhood through the juxtaposition of photographs and handwritten captions, much like the way in which the collective adult "we" acknowledged by Jenkins moulds contemporary constructions of childhood (1998, p. 2). The placement of the child at the juncture of past and future in this sequence, and indeed in the film as a whole, gestures towards the futurity of the figure of the child, identified by Lee Edelman as "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2004, p. 3). In the case of the child in *Raise Ravens*, local and global coincide in this regard, since, as Sarah Wright observes, Francoism hinged upon "an ideology of "reproductive futurism" [...] which proclaimed the cult of the child through its imagery" (2013, p. 106). By situating the child at the juncture of conflicting temporalities, the opening sequences of the three films analysed here thus challenge the futurity of the child, in both local and global contexts of reproductive futurism and heterofuturity.

Childhood, Chronologicality, Cinematography

Contesting the positioning of the child as a symbol of the future, the anti-linear, non-chronological character of the childhood temporalities portrayed in each of these three films disrupt the premise of reproductive futurity. As mentioned above, the narrative action at the beginning of *Pan's Labyrinth* transitions into the past by means of an anti-clockwise camera spin before the camera penetrates the pupil of the child's eye. Through this non-chronological movement and visual penetration of the body of the child, the film embraces a vision of childhood in opposition to its conventional understandings as a "vertical movement upward [...] toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness" (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 4). This refusal of heteronormative reproductive futurism is confirmed by Ofelia herself when she asserts, having witnessed her mother suffer traumatic complications in the late stages of pregnancy, that she has no desire to have a child of her own – a prophecy the viewer knows will prove true, having already witnessed her death at the start of the film. *Pan's Labyrinth* configures childhood as a form of "sideways growth", embracing anti-linear forms, "the horizontal – what spreads sideways – or sideways and backwards – more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time" (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 4), and accounting for "ways of growing that are not growing up" (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 11). Locally, the emphasis on non-chronologicality, circularity and "sideways growth" is indicative of the postmemory generation, given that *Pan's Labyrinth* is a postmemory product. For this generation, access to the past is delimited by the waning presence of those who directly experienced the events in question as well as by the state-sanctioned silencing of discourses and dialogues concerning the past. Globally, this revisioning of children, childhood and time is, as Halberstam argues, a symptom of our postmodern understanding of time as "not linear" and of generational differences as "more loopy and complex than we imagine when we plot them out along the straight lines of chronological age", evidence of "more twisty, curvy, more relative notions of time, age, and difference" (2012, xxiii).

Like *Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Raise Ravens* also cinematographically emphasise the extent to which their female child protagonists subvert the heteronormative logic of reproductive futurity. *The Spirit of the Beehive* deploys elliptical editing patterns which at once resonate with the distinctiveness of children's experiences of the passing of time (Halberstam, 2012, xxiii) and with the gaps and omissions within Republican history and memory under Franco. Jump cuts and time lapses in three consecutive scenes epitomise this particular aspect of childhood temporalities in the film. In the first of these three scenes, Ana, Isabel and their classmates approach their school building, which is frontally framed and filmed with a static camera. A series of dissolves, accompanied by an allegro instrumental piece, show various young girls entering the school building. As the tune comes to an end, the camera pauses momentarily in a still, silent image that is only broken by a sound bridge of the children reciting their multiplication tables. The second scene in this series depicts Ana and Isabel at the edge of an expansive field. In the distance are a barn and a well in which, according to Isabel, Frankenstein lives. As the girls run towards the barn, another allegro instrumental track strikes up, similar although not exactly the same as before. Another series of jump cuts depicts the progress of the girls across the vast landscape. In the third of these consecutive scenes, Isabel enters the barn while Ana waits in the distance. Both girls then exit the frame, only for Ana to re-enter moments later, with a noticeably more subdued instrumental piece replacing the upbeat, light-hearted tones of the previous two scenes. A slight change in lighting, and the fact that Ana now wears red rather than beige tights, indicate that a time lapse has occurred.

The elliptical editing patterns of *The Spirit of the Beehive* provide a fruitful site for the exploration of childhood temporalities. Both John Hopewell and Marsha Kinder interpret these elliptical editing patterns in terms of the mythical time evoked by the film. For Hopewell, they ‘produce an increasing atemporality’, demonstrating the film’s entry into ‘the realms of myth where chronology and geography become blurred’ (1986, p. 205). Meanwhile, for Kinder, the jump cuts in particular ‘seem to embalm moments in time’ (1993, p. 132). Again indicative of the local and global resonances of the child and childhood, the elliptical editing patterns of *The Spirit of the Beehive* at once underscore the curiousness of the child’s relation to time, distinct to that of adults and more appropriate in our postmodern age (Halberstam, 2012, xxiii), as well as the curiousness of Republican time in light of its gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies resulting from its atomisation and suppression under Franco. Producing a vision of time that is non-linear, circular, repetitious and rife with fissures, *The Spirit of the Beehive* hints at the anti-linearity and non-chronologicality of childhood temporalities and of time more generally under Franco.

While *The Spirit of the Beehive* cinematographically conveys the ways in which the child disrupts the chronological logic of heteronormative reproductive futurism by means of elliptical editing, *Raise Ravens* achieves a similar effect through fluid cinematographic transitions between past, present and future. Transitions between the present and future narrative frames of 1975 and 1995 are aurally fluid, the voice-over of the adult Ana intervening to carry the action into the future and back again.⁷ Movements back in time, before the deaths of Ana’s parents, are less easily distinguished from the present. While present and future are spatially distinct, past and present fuse together, often occupying the same physical location. An illustrative example is the sequence in which Ana and her sisters are taken by their aunt Paulina to the *finca* that belongs to Nicolás and Amelia and in which

Ana witnesses her father's infidelity and sees her mother and her aunt walking arm-in-arm throughout the grounds of the property. These events do not belong to the same temporal moment but rather represent a fusion of distinct memories of different visits to the property. This underscores the cinematographic fluidity of time in *Raise Ravens*.

Several scholars, including Marvin D'Lugo (1991, p. 134), Gwynne Edwards (1995, p. 93), Prout (2005, p. 153) and Rob Stone (2002, p. 100), comment on the complex temporal structure of the film, generally agreeing that it conveys a sense of incoherence, uncertainty, doubt and mystery. By contrast, Yeon Soo-Kim proposes that in such sequences "temporal distance is collapsed and a proximity between past and present is underlined, through which the adult Ana is enabled to reenact visually her traumatic experiences that remained outside the photographic frames" (2005, p. 76). While the film cinematographically – but more specifically and most commonly aurally – stresses a fluid and proximate relationship amongst past, present and future, other aspects of the film, such as the dual casting of Chaplin and the content of the adult Ana's dialogue, challenge this relationship of fluidity and proximity. The centrality of the child within this temporal dialectic attests to both the specificity of the film's Francoist production and to the universal temporal functions of the child. In *Raise Ravens*, the child signifies both the atomised, repressed past of twentieth-century Spain as well as the inaccessibility of the past more generally. More interestingly, the characterisation of the relations amongst past, present and future as simultaneously fluid and impermeable exemplifies the ways in which the time of the child, both in *Raise Ravens* and beyond, disavows the rigid linearity and chronological character of heteronormativity and reproductive futurism.

Tracking Time / Generations and Genealogies

The three films analysed here do not just highlight the subversive potency of childhood temporalities through cinematography. They also evidence this destabilising potential by undermining, and presenting alternatives to, patriarchal structures of inheritance. In each case, the subversion of such structures occurs by means of one or two key objects. In *Raise Ravens*, the objects in question are a pistol and a small pot of bicarbonate of soda, left to Ana by her father and mother respectively. As Virginia Higginbotham observes, the child protagonist of *Raise Ravens* “tries to control her world” with these items (1988, p. 95), utilising them as weapons with which to rid herself of the wretched adults who seek to confine and restrict her. Having been asked by her mother to throw away the bicarbonate of soda, described by her as “un veneno terrible” (“a terrible poison”) strong enough to kill an elephant with just a small teaspoon, Ana rebels and holds onto the small box of powder. She then subsequently uses it in attempts to kill her father, her aunt and even herself, albeit half-heartedly. Her aunt is also the subject at whom Ana takes aim with her father’s pistol, precisely when Paulina engages in an intimate embrace with Nicolás, a friend and military colleague of Ana’s father. That Nicolás succeeds in obtaining the pistol from Ana through his assertion that the weapon is “un juguete de muchachos” (“a boy’s toy”) only serves to emphasise the subversiveness of the (female) child who seeks to murder the various patriarchal figures of authority by whom she is surrounded. Undermining both patriarchal genealogies and the logic of heteronormativity, Ana thus epitomises the significance of the cinematic child as a means of subverting temporalities governed by such restrictive paradigms.

The objects of inheritance in both *The Spirit of the Beehive* and *Pan's Labyrinth* are more explicitly connected to childhood temporalities, given that they are time-keeping instruments: pocket watches and hourglasses. *The Spirit of the Beehive* immediately foregrounds the importance of the pocket watch. The penultimate image in the opening credits, appearing alongside the name of director Erice, is a golden pocket watch, drawn by Torrent and Tellería, the actresses who play Ana and Isabel respectively. Belonging to Fernando, the pocket watch is inadvertently bequeathed by Ana to a Republican fugitive who has sought shelter in a nearby barn. The watch is subsequently returned to Fernando via the Civil Guard following the execution of the fugitive. Its transferral amongst these distinct male figures of authority and dissidence propels the plot forward, signalling the narrative importance of the watch. Visually, the timepiece features in numerous close-ups throughout the film, carefully contemplated by each of the male figures who possess it. Existing scholarship tends to focus on the watch either as a symbol of paternity and patriarchy, an interpretation upheld by Carmen Arocena (1996, pp. 143-4), Robert Miles (2007, pp. 110-1; 2011, p. 198), E. C. Riley (1984, pp. 494-5) and Dominique Russell (1999, p. 21), or in terms of time and temporality, as Edwards (1995, p. 138) and Santos Zunzunegui Díez (1998, pp. 141-2) propose in their analyses of the film. Even more significant is the way in which the relationship between the watch and the child.

While the opening intertitles of *The Spirit of the Beehive* juxtapose the local and global connotations of the child and childhood, the pocket watch symbolises the curiousness of childhood temporalities as identified by Bond Stockton and Halberstam. Of key importance is the circularity of the pocket watch, literally in terms of its appearance and its method of tracking time, hands moving in a circular, repetitious direction around a circular clock face, and symbolically in terms of its movement between the adult male characters of the film.

Associated with the circularity of the pocket watch, childhood is no longer figured as a “vertical movement upward” toward adulthood, but rather comprises “notions of the horizontal – what spreads sideways – or sideways and backwards” (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 4). Moreover, that child protagonist Ana never knowingly possesses the watch implicitly indicates the child’s emplacement beyond history and historical time in line with Halberstam’s assertion that the child is “out of time” (2011, p. 27). However, Ana does instigate the transferrals and circulations of the watch amongst the aforementioned male characters in the film. Given that the pocket watch is an object of inheritance typically passed down the paternal line, Ana’s interactions with this object destabilise patriarchal structures of inheritance and signify an alternative historical genealogy in which the daughter, albeit unknowingly, acquires the family heirloom and passes it to an anonymous Republican fugitive.⁸ Through this political gesture, *The Spirit of the Beehive* simultaneously undermines the configuration of childhood as a linear trajectory toward adulthood and aligns the child with the histories of Spanish Republicans, which were suppressed and atomised throughout the duration of Franco’s rule.⁹

The pocket watch is similarly important in *Pan’s Labyrinth*. Featuring in a number of extreme close-ups over the course of the film, the pocket watch is an object of inheritance, passed onto Captain Vidal by his own father, reputedly a great soldier rumoured to have smashed his watch at the exact moment of his death, so as to communicate to his son both the time of his death and the means by which a brave man dies. At the film’s conclusion, Vidal himself attempts to enact such a genealogical legacy. Clutching his pocket watch tightly, Vidal requests that Mercedes and the rest of the Resistance tell his son the time of his death, the ticking of the watch distinctly audible and dramatically enhanced to underscore the fact that the Captain’s time is running out. Mercedes interrupts him, advising him that his son will

not even know his name. The ticking sound fades completely as soon as she speaks, symbolically emphasising the erasure of the Captain's legacy. Mercedes' brother promptly shoots and kills Vidal. By refusing the Captain's request to pass the watch, and its legacy, onto his son, Mercedes disrupts the personal family genealogy of the Captain and facilitates new non-linear means of understanding familial relations.¹⁰ Unlike Ana of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, Ofelia has little connection to the pocket watch in *Pan's Labyrinth*. She is, to quote Halberstam, "out of time" (2011, p. 27), at once indicative of the children placed "outside social divisions [...] beyond historical change" (Jenkins, 1998, pp. 3-4) and, in the context of Francoism, those associated with the Republic who "had no history" (Richards, 1998, p. 7).

Besides the pocket watch, the Faun introduces an alternative instrument for the measurement of time in *Pan's Labyrinth*: an hourglass. The hourglass plays a less significant visual and narrative role than the pocket watch, only featuring in Ofelia's second task. While the pocket watch remains out with the child's grasp, Ofelia has direct contact with the hourglass. She is instructed by the Faun and by the Book of Crossroads to return from the Pale Man's chamber before the last grain of sand falls and warned that her life depends upon it. As Ofelia undertakes the challenge, and as her time quickly runs out, the hourglass is framed in a series of extreme close-ups. Disregarding the temporal restrictions placed on her, Ofelia runs out of time and is forced to find a new escape route as the Pale Man attempts to catch her. Her disobedience of the Faun, insofar as she contravenes the temporal restraints he imposes upon her, simultaneously endangers her and angers him.

While the watch is a modern instrument of time measurement, the hourglass is a more traditional timepiece. This distinction is emphasised by the materials with which each piece is

constructed: the watch is encased in cold, industrial metal, the hourglass rendered in earthy wood. Similarly, while the watch depicts time as circular, by means of the progression of hands around a circular face, the hourglass depicts time as unhinged, bi-directional and reversible. Ofelia's association with the hourglass emphasises an understanding of childhood in opposition to the linearity and verticality of narratives of growing "up" (Bond Stockton, 2009, p. 4), rendering childhood temporality fragmentary and reversible. Once again, this has both local and global significances, representative at once of the restrictions placed upon childhood growth throughout the Francoist dictatorship and of the more general limitedness of understandings of childhood as a linear, developmental trajectory towards adulthood. Ultimately, Ofelia's association with the hourglass rather than the pocket watch constitutes a further component of the subversion of patriarchal structures of inheritance in *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Childhood and Colonial Time

By means of their diverse portraits of children in Francoist Spain, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *Raise Ravens* and *Pan's Labyrinth* reflect upon the subversiveness of childhood temporalities. Through their opening sequences, cinematography and the depiction of objects of inheritance, these films convey the extent to which the figure of the child has the potential to challenge conceptualisations of chronological time as rigid, fixed, linear and progressive. At a local level, in the context of the legacies of Francoist Spain, the subversive potential of the child with respect to time reads as a direct and defiant challenge to the rigid linearity of Francoist historiography and to the atomisation of Republican memory and history. More broadly, the intersections of child and time in these films call into question the figurative use

of the child in the service of heteronormative reproductive futurity, a gesture that proves productive in terms of rethinking our relationship to time writ large.

Beyond its significance as signalling the already-established unsocialised and therefore rebellious potential of the child, the relationship between the child and time constitutes an important political and theoretical horizon of contemporary western thought. From a postcolonial perspective, the conceptual connection of childhood and time recalls cultural, political and philosophical paradigms in which the non-western colonial subject is figured as child-like, as in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969). Such paradigms form the focus of Johannes Fabian's seminal work *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, in which he unpacks the significance of time in the context of anthropological discourse and denounces the "denial of coevalness" – whereby the anthropological referent is persistently and systematically placed "*in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*" (2014, p. 31, original emphasis). For Fabian, the categorisation of such subjects as infantile overlooks the fact that relations between adults and children in western societies are not simply reflections of "different degrees of "extension" of knowledge" as well as the fact that "adult-child relations are also, and sometimes primarily, fraught with barely disguised attitudes of power and practices of repression and abuse" (2014, p. 63). Ultimately, he contends that to consider these individuals as childlike is not "just a neutral classificatory act, but a powerful rhetorical figure and motive, informing colonial practice in every aspect" (2014, p. 63).

To what extent is this account of the interrelations amongst colonial subjects, children and time relevant in the context of the three Spanish films analysed in this article? The key lies

with *Pan's Labyrinth*, a transnational co-production, a product of our contemporary globalised postcolonial world, a vision of the west constructed from the perspective of a transnational Mexican filmmaker. Read through the lens of its production history, *Pan's Labyrinth* undermines the evolutionist temporal paradigm championed by the west, the “developed world”, in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. The smashed pocket watch, which requires constant mending and whose genealogical transferral is denied by the Republican resistance following Vidal's death, epitomises the inadequacy of this temporal paradigm. That Vidal's father, the original owner of the watch, is said to have fought in colonial conflicts in Morocco only enhances this reading.

The child has a particularly important role to play with regard to the film's destabilisation of colonial and postcolonial relations. Left to perish in a cold bleak post-Civil War landscape, Ofelia is reborn, in the guise of Princess Moana, into an Underground Realm that appears to transcend the constraints of time.¹¹ As Ann Davies points out, the underground kingdom to which Ofelia returns invites comparisons with Latin America given the casting of Argentinean actor Federico Luppi in the role of the King/Moana's father (2012, p. 27). For Davies, this aspect of the film not only signifies the extent to which Francoist forces sought “to recover the glory of Spain's imperial past” during the Civil War but also reminds us that “many who opposed Franco were forced to go into exile, often to Latin America, their lives in Spain abandoned for new lives in new lands” (2012, p. 27). By demonstrating how the child is banished from the contemporary western world, governed as it is by the strict linearity of chronological time, and instead accommodated within a subterranean domain free from such temporal restrictions, *Pan's Labyrinth* exposes the multiplicity of histories, concerned with both colonial pasts and globalised presents, buried beneath the surface of post-Franco, postmemory cultural products. Childhood temporalities as depicted in Spanish

cinema thus provide a productive prism through which to reassess the cross-cultural relations that characterise our contemporary globalised world.

Conclusion

Read together, the cinematic child protagonists of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *Raise Ravens* and *Pan's Labyrinth* reconfigure Francoist paradigms of childhood and time from diverse historical and geographical standpoints. Ofelia, the protagonist of *Pan's Labyrinth*, condenses these concerns, insofar as she transcends distinct temporal planes and functions as a palimpsest of various historical and geographical layers of conflict. Through their opening sequences, cinematography and focus on objects of inheritance, these films underscore the temporal subversiveness of the child. By destabilising and defying the linearity of patriarchal heteronormative futurity, the cinematic child protagonists of these three films reconfigure both the local histories specific to Francoist and post-Francoist Spain and global pasts and presents.

But the significance of these cinematic children extends beyond these local and global resonances concerning the politics of childhood temporalities. The disjunction between adult and child rests at the core of the cinematic experience insofar as the individuals we encounter within the cinematic image are both our forebears and our children of sorts. They hail from an era that is, by comparison, far more simple than that of contemporary society. The conjunction of childhood with cinema underscores the temporal curiousness of the child given that cinema is a medium which participates in 'the structuring of time and contingency' (Doane, 2002, pp. 3-4). Beyond the socio-historical specificity of twentieth-century Spain, the figure of the cinematic child, specifically with regard to its intersection with time, is thus

crucial in terms of understanding the theoretical underpinnings of our relationship with cinema.¹²

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¹ For more on the child and time, see Noble (2015, pp. 13-108).

² On the relevance of gender in these films see also Noble (2015, pp. 38-45, pp. 56-64, pp. 98-104).

³ The theme of memory merits further consideration in relation to the child, time and cinema as depicted not just in *The Spirit of the Beehive* but also more prevalently in *Raise Ravens*. Unfortunately, it lies beyond the scope of this article to undertake a thorough analysis of the significance of memory in this regard.

⁴ The *años de hambre* refers to the long post-war period in Spain, during which the population suffered severe economic hardship as a result of the regime's autarchic policies.

⁵ On the relationship between innocence and death, Kincaid asks 'Do we feel that a defiled child is of no use to us and might as well be dead?' (1998, p.17), albeit in the context of child molestation rather than of the transition from childhood to adolescence.

⁶ The relationship between music and the maternal merits further exploration both specifically in relation to *Raise Ravens* and more generally in the context of Spanish cinema. However, this lies beyond the scope of this article.

⁷ In the first of these scenes, there is a visual as well as aural fluidity to the transition between temporal planes, insofar as the camera, having been fixed on young Ana, pans to the right to reveal the adult Ana. However, this is the only instance in which a fluid visual movement occurs between the film's present and future narrative planes.

⁸ While both Curry (1996, pp. 273-4) and Miles (2007, pp. 104-10) speculate that the Republican fugitive is in fact Ana's father, their contentions are based not on the metonymic association of the paternal and the patriarchal bestowed by the pocket watch but rather, as Miles observes in his discussion of Curry's argument (2007, pp. 104-5), on the distinctiveness of dark-haired Ana amongst her fair-haired family (1996, p. 273).

⁹ For a compelling and comprehensive account of the dismantling and atomisation of Republican history and memory in Francoist Spain, see Renshaw (2011).

¹⁰ For more on the significance of Mercedes in relation to the child and gender in *Pan's Labyrinth*, see Noble (2015, pp. 98-104).

¹¹ Of course this is not the only underground territory that Ofelia enters in *Pan's Labyrinth*: she also gains access to the subterranean lair of the Pale Man during her second task. In contrast to the Underground Kingdom over which Ofelia/Moana will eventually reign, the Pale Man's chamber is strictly governed by time given that she is instructed to return within the time dictated by the hour glass. The Pale Man's abode lies beneath, and constitutes a mirror reflection of, the home of Captain Vidal. That Ofelia survives her temporal transgression within the domain of the Pale Man prefigures her triumph over Vidal and ultimately her transposition to immortality and a world beyond temporal restraint. I would like to thank the anonymous reader who drew my attention to this point.

¹² I would like to thank the anonymous reader for making these observations about the significance of my arguments about the child, time and cinema.